

2021 WELLFLEET SHELLFISH DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT

Things improved on the flats this year, but the effects of declining restaurant markets due to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt, most significantly in oyster markets. On the bright side, another year without ice meant for solid oyster recruitment and growth in Wellfleet Harbor, especially in Chipman's Cove and Duck Creek. The Herring River looked good, too, but oysters had not yet reached harvestable size. In addition, significant recruitment of quahog seed was brought to our attention by clambers in Chipman's Cove. They feel this is the benefit of participating in the state-run contaminated quahog relay, which requires a spawning closure. Neoplasia in quahogs, however, continues to cause mortality. We began a collaboration with Roger Williams University and Aquacultural Research Corporation on a Northeast Regional Aquaculture Center grant to conduct scientific research together on this.

The Shellfish Department team continues to mature and improve, taking on still more responsibilities, such as new requirements from the state, implementing Town grant oversight regulations and participating in greater Town issues and initiatives, such as rights of public access, beach nourishment and sea walls, wastewater/clean water, hazard mitigation, financial oversight, etc. As always, the Shellfish Department covers each low tide, checks boats at high tide, conducts enforcement and handles administrative oversight every day of the year except Christmas. Here are some highlights from our work in 2021.

COVID-19 Efforts

- The Department was awarded a \$10,000 COVID-19 Response Funding for Municipal Programs and Industry Support Program grant through MIT and Woods Hole Sea Grant and a matching \$5,000 grant from the Massachusetts Oyster Project.
- With these grants, the Department organized an oyster buyback of 30,000 oysters from about 30 farmers, and each farmer received \$500.00. A handful of farmers also elected to donate oysters to this propagation program. Oysters were broadcasted in the Indian Neck Recreational Only area to help relieve increased recreational shellfishing pressure there since the onset of the pandemic.
- The Shellfishermen's Farmers Market, started during the winter of 2020, continued through June of 2021. It took a summer break and picked back up in the fall. Its successful operation has been turned over to the Wellfleet Shellfishermen's Association. It continues to be an avenue of sales for shellfishermen during the slower winter months and builds community connections with customers who enjoy interacting with the shellfishermen who provided their food.
- Nancy Civetta was awarded "Constable of the Year" by the Mass. Shellfish Officers Association for her work in Wellfleet and in creating this market.

Grant Activities

- It took the whole year, but nearly all the 155 grants in Wellfleet were inspected. We have seen incredible improvement, and grants are nearly 100% compliant with our regulations. Grant holders have put in much effort to clean up derelict gear, tag gear and rectify buoy placement using the department's hand-held GPS.
- We began working through unmet minimum productivity requirements on grants.

- A total of 1,516 racks were left out during the winter: a ~50% reduction since 2019.
- The Selectboard voted to place a moratorium on new grant and grant extension requests in the HDYLTA property and asked the Shellfish Advisory Board to hold public sessions to determine best uses and an overall plan for it.

Wild Fishery

- A conservative estimate of commercial catches is more than 1,200 bushels of oysters, 1,600 bushels of quahogs, 125 bushels of bay scallops and 170 bushels of blood clams. Compared to last year the oyster catch total is up 25%, and the blood clam catch total is up 82%. On the downside, the bay scallop catch total is down 80%, and the quahog catch total is down 18%. Some of these fluctuations could be due to the pandemic.
- We issued four written warnings and no citations. The commercial shellfishery is high functioning.
- Recreational catch totals once again saw a noteworthy increase from the year prior. A conservative estimate of recreational catch totals is more than 300 bushels of oysters, up 18%, and 150 bushels of quahogs, up 4%. Additionally, the number of recreational permit holders fishing increased 11% from 2020 to 2021.
- We sold 880 recreational permits and 172 commercial permits, totaling \$86,759. Commercial permit sales were down 5% from 2020. The total value of permit sales was down 1% compared to 2020.
- The Selectboard once again decided not to sell seasonal recreational permits. Despite that, the number of recreational permits sold in 2021 was 13% higher than in 2020.
- The Department continued to conduct orientations for first-year commercial permitholders to provide helpful guidance for newcomers. We continued to send welcome emails to new recreational permitholders detailing important regulations, fishery updates and areas open for harvest. We continued to send monthly email “Shellfish Criers” to both commercial and recreational shellfishermen with news.
- We encountered many problems with recreational shellfishermen taking seed and had a few instances of people going over the catch limit. We issued several email warnings, and we have begun marking the permits of those who have seed with an “S” to signify that the permitholder has already received a warning about seed in their catch as well as an explanation as to why seed should not be taken.

Propagation Efforts

- The Department planted 500,000 quahog seed and 375,000 oyster seed on our grant.
- We broadcasted more than 90,000 oysters to the Indian Neck Recreational Only Area.
- The Department purchased 260,000 quahogs from the state-monitored contaminated quahog relay from the Taunton River. We transplanted 110,000 to Burton Baker Beach and 150,000 to Chipman’s Cove. Burton Baker Beach will remain closed until June 2022 to ensure a well-stocked summer fishery in 2022.
- Cultching was completed with 49 runs in the harbor focusing mainly on Blackfish Creek and Loagy Bay. The Department would like to thank the D.P.W for the great work and assistance this year with our cultching efforts.

- We received six loads of sea clam shell to overwinter for next year's clutching effort. We participated in the Mass Oyster Project's shell recycling program with seven local restaurants and will overwinter these oyster and clam shells at the Transfer Station.
- This year, we set out all of our spat collecting devices on the town grant. We caught a great set. A few grant holders donated seed oysters from their spat collectors to the department. We estimate that we have approximately 500,000 remote set oyster seed.
- We had another successful pitting year with little to no oyster mortality.

Other Points of Interest

- Wellfleet's Shellfishing Policy and Regulations were amended to include an application procedure for applying for grants and grant extensions and to include an 18-month exception to the domicile requirements for commercial permit and grant holders who lose their housing in Wellfleet through no fault of their own.
- This year, Andrew Ryan left the Wellfleet Shellfish Department. We'd like to thank him for his years of service and dedication to our industry.
- The Department hired both a full-time and a part-time Seasonal Deputy. The extra hands helped us keep better records of recreational fishery activities and infractions and undertake new initiatives, such as creating a *Guide to Shellfish Farming Gear in Wellfleet Harbor* brochure, new signage and increased communications.
- Wellfleet Harbor was dredged this year around the L-pier and Marina. In learning from an incident last year, maps were distributed, and site visits were conducted with the contractors to demonstrate where vulnerable shellfish resources were located. There were no incidents.
- To prepare for dredging, approximately 300 bushels of oysters were relocated from the outer bar in Chipman's Cove to other areas of the Cove with help of AmeriCorps and recreational shellfishermen volunteers.
- In addition to Selectboard and Shellfish Advisory Board meetings, we participated with the Conservation Commission, the Dredging Task Force, the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Planning Committee, the Natural Resources Advisory Board, the Rights of Public Access Committee, and the Marina Advisory Committee.
- The Department once again hosted an AmeriCorps member on our team. The Department held several AmeriCorps project days to assist with propagation activities, pitting and overwintering efforts, boat maintenance and gear assembly. We are proud of our continued and fruitful relationship with AmeriCorps Cape Cod.
- We also participated in other state and town efforts, such as the Mass. Shellfish Initiative, the Inter-Municipal Shoreline Management CZM Resiliency Grant, low lying roads discussions, the Herring River Restoration Project, and shellfish disease testing with Barnstable County Cape Cod Cooperative Extension, among others.
- Wellfleet Shellfish received much media attention this year. See our monthly reports on the Shellfish Department page of the town's website for links.